DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 476 935 CE 085 023

TITLE	Meeting the Needs of Older Learners A Briefing for LSCs. NIACE Briefing Sheet.
INSTITUTION	National Inst. of Adult Continuing Education, Leicester (England).
REPORT NO	No-30
PUB DATE	2002-06-00
NOTE	10p.
AVAILABLE FROM	National Institute of Adult Continuing Education,Renaissance House, 20 Princess Road West, Leicester LE1 6TP, United Kingdom. Web site: http://www.niace.org.uk (free). For full text: http://www.niace.org.uk/information/Briefing_sheets/Meeting_needs_olde r_learners.htm.
PUB TYPE	Information Analyses (070)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS
DESCRIPTORS	Adult Education; Adult Students; Caregiver Training; *Educational Gerontology; *Educational Needs; *Educational Practices; *Enrollment Trends; Foreign Countries; Lifelong Learning; Money Management; *Older Adults; Older Workers; Postsecondary Education; Preretirement Education; Retirement; School Community Relationship; *Student Characteristics; Student Needs
IDENTIFIERS	Elder Care; Financial Literacy; *United Kingdom

ABSTRACT

The special needs of older learners, rates of participation in learning by older adults in the United Kingdom, and areas in which older adults are in particular need of learning opportunities were examined, and 24 recommendations were developed to assist learning and skills councils across the United Kingdom in meeting those needs. The following were among the recommendations presented: (1) recognize the benefits of relating to and working with other agencies to develop learning provision for older adults; (2) consult with local communities and relevant community organizations to better understand individual and community needs; (3) help local information, advice, and guidance partnerships and local lifelong learning partnerships to consider the financial literacy needs of older people in terms of curriculum; (4) map existing pre-retirement programs to ascertain the quality, quantity, and accessibility of local provision; (5) support better training for those who provide care and activities for older people in care settings; (6) identify, promote, and support projects to help older people obtain work; (7) support initiatives to help mature workers and job seekers prepare for specific industries; and (8) ensure the availability of targeted local education and guidance to help older people decide how to become involved in their communities. (Lists 17 references and suggestions for further reading.) (MN)

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ED 476 935

NIACE Briefing Sheet 30

Meeting the Needs of Older Learners–A Briefing for LSCs

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Meeting the needs of Older learners - a briefing for LSCs

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"...many adults, including large numbers of older and retired learners will want to pursue high quality and rigorous study for its own sake, and I expect provision to be made available to meet their needs." (Blunkett, 2000, letter of remit to LSC)

This is the thirtieth in a series of briefing sheets which aim to provide an introduction to a variety of lifelong learning issues

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Who are 'older people'?

In a society focused on youth, it is hard to define. The 1993 *Carnegie Inquiry into the Third Age* for statistical purposes defined the Third Age (stage of life) as 50-75 with those older considered to be in the Fourth Age. In areas of employment, being older often starts at 40 or 45.

Older people are usually distinguished as being marginalised in some small or large way from various aspects of society.

Evidence shows that people over age 45 are excluded from work-based training; those over age 50 are not engaged in employment, education and voluntary activities. Those over 75, it is argued, are discriminated against in health and social care where they may receive little or no opportunities to learn.

The term 'older people' therefore can cover most of our lives, but because of the exclusion and discrimination that being older can bring, does require special attention in adult education and training policy.

It is important, whilst requiring age-related statistical data to inform us of progress, *not* to categorise people by age but rather be aware of the 'stages' in life achieved and individual need which can arise from learning for and in work to learning in care settings.

This huge age range also indicates that the breadth of opportunity accorded younger people must also be accorded older adults. Many older people still wish to work. The demographic changes currently taking place in our society highlight the urgent need to retain the wealth of experience and maturity within our social economy.

LSCs

This briefing paper is for local Learning and Skills Councils (LSCs). It aims to provide information on some of the work that is currently being carried out around older people and learning, and to highlight key areas of concern. NIACE hopes this will provide a useful starting point to help LSCs develop their plans to respond to the needs of the ageing population.

"The total economic cost is high. The drop in work rates among the over-50s since 1979 costs the economy about £16 billion a year in lost GDP and costs the public purse £3-5 billion in extra benefits and lost taxes."
Source: Winning the Generation Game, 2000

"The proportion of the population who are aged 50 and over has doubled this century, to one in three as we enter the new millennium. This trend is set to continue with around 25 million people - 40% of the population – likely to be over 50 by 2021."
Source: Making a Difference: Better Government for Older People evaluation report, 2000

In April 2000, NIACE produced a briefing paper encouraging older people and older people's organisations to make contact with their local LSCs, Local Lifelong Learning Partnerships (LLPs) and information, advice and guidance partnerships (IAGs) to ensure that the needs of older people were on the agenda under the new funding arrangements. Since then, some LSCs have started to develop their plans around older people, and there is evidence that a number of LSCs are considering the learning and training needs of older people. The picture, however, remains patchy, and the broader agenda needs to be addressed.

There are a number of recommendations for LSCs that underpin this briefing. LSCs may wish to:

- consult with older people about what they want and need.
- ensure that older people and their organisations feature in LLP and IAG plans.
- ensure *clarity* and *consistency* of approach around fees and concessions.
- consider how to facilitate the process in cases where older people's organisations have the necessary experience and competence to deliver their own programmes.

Older people and learning

Participation rates
A recent article written by Jim Soulsby for Help the Aged's Evidence Review on Age Discrimination, '*On the Scrapheap*', examined the recruitment and participation of older learners in the sectors of education relevant to older people. It revealed that:

- Over the last five years participation rates in learning have improved across the board, but oldest learners are among those who have benefited least (8% increase in the 55-64 age group compared to a 12% increase in 35-54 age group, dropping to 3% in the 65-74 age group, and -3% in the 75+ age group).
- In **local authority adult education**, participation of older people has shown a slight improvement in the last few years (people aged 60+ making up 24% of total enrolments in 2000 compared to 22.1% in 1998). Over 40% of daytime students on non-vocational, non-accredited courses are aged 60+, compared to less than 20% on vocational and accredited courses. The proportions almost halve for evening courses. This highlights the preference of older people for daytime, non-vocational activities.
- Older people are increasing proportionately in **further education**, with nearly 1/10 of students in 1999/2000 aged 56 or over. There is still considerable under-representation of older people, but some excellent work has been undertaken. Adults are the majority of students.
- In **higher education** provision, only 0.4% of first year full-time undergraduates in 1999/2000 were aged 50 or over, 15.5% of part-time equivalents. The one exception in higher education is the Open University, whose profile of students over age 50 is 12.2% in 1994 to 16.3% of undergraduates in 2000/1. The upper age limit on student loans (55) denies older people the opportunity to access full-time higher education, yet the government is encouraging older people to fulfil a role as responsible, socially included citizens.

Clearly, older people are not present in adult learning in numbers and proportions corresponding to their numbers and proportions in the total population. Over the last three to four years there has been a slow improvement in participation rates, but there is still a long way to go.

What older people want to learn

Learning to Grow Older & Bolder (Carlton & Soulsby, 1999) identified some key features of older learners' participation:

- Older people want to learn, just like younger people, and they are no different in their wide-ranging learning needs. There is a need to overcome prejudices and assumptions about what they want.

- Older people are less likely to require 'vocational' accredited activities, and are more likely to consider activities that primarily satisfy social need, allow opportunities for reflection and understanding of their life's achievements and satisfy curiosity of the new – particularly IT. In the age group 55+, languages, computing, business, history and leisure emerged as the most popular subjects for study. This does not mean to say, however, that some older people will not want accreditation. In many instances, particularly employment related, this will be highly relevant.

- Older people appreciate being consulted about their learning needs.

- Drawing on older peoples' life experiences and maturity is a useful way of attracting them to learning opportunities. Any guided assessment of prior learning and experience could raise confidence, self-esteem and motivation.

Examples of the benefits of collaborative working

National Service Framework Standard Eight: The promotion of health and active life in older age

The Local Government Association is promoting pathfinder local authorities that wish to develop policies and actions to help older people retain their independence. One of the tools for this is the new National Service Framework for Older People, which, in Standard Eight, identifies education and leisure as an effective prevention against illness. This co-ordinated programme of action is led by the NHS with support from councils and other agencies, and provides a good example for LSCs of the benefits of relating to other agencies.

Better Government for Older People

The Better Government for Older People programme (BGOP) ran between 1998 and 2000 and was a unique partnership between central and local government, the voluntary sector, the academic community and older people. It aimed to improve public services for older people by better meeting their needs, listening to their views and encouraging and recognising their contribution. Although the initial BGOP programme has now ended, the BGOP Network, a forum for local authorities, other service providers and older people and their organisations, continues alongside the influential Older Peoples Advisory Group (OPAG).

Recommendations for LSCs

- **Link in and consult with the BGOP Network and OPAG to build on the achievements of the BGOP programme to facilitate relevant learning opportunities for older people.**
- **Recognise the benefits of relating to and working with other agencies to develop learning provision for older people.**

Further information: BGOP web site: www.bettergovernmentforolderpeople.gov.uk. National Service Framework for Older People: www.doh.gov.uk/nsf/olderpeople.htm

Areas for Action

There are a number of issues that need to be addressed. Here we offer a brief summary of these and highlight the key recommendations for LSCs. We also provide some useful contacts for the range of organisations working in these areas.

Black and minority ethnic elders

Over the next 50 years the current proportion of black and minority ethnic elders is set to grow significantly. (It was estimates in 1993 that the percentage of black elders would increase tenfold in the next 30 years, from 3.2% in 1993 to 32.5%). However, older people from such communities remain absent from existing learning provision for numerous reasons, including the fact that the provision available to them is often irrelevant, culturally inappropriate and inaccessible.

Recommendations for LSCs

- **Consult and work with local communities and relevant community organisations, to better understand individual and community needs.**
- **Make efforts to overcome communication problems through the publication of materials in relevant minority languages, and where necessary, employ interpreters.**
- **Be aware of cultural and other diversities.**
- **Provide training for staff involved in the delivery of learning provision to sensitise them to the issues concerning the needs of older people from black and minority ethnic communities.**

Useful contacts: Policy Research Institute on Ageing and Ethnicity (PRIAE), 31-32 Park Row, Leeds LS1 5JD. Tel: 0113 285 5990. Web site: www.priae.org

Financial Literacy

A recent pilot study conducted for NIACE among people over the age of 50 revealed that almost 30% experienced some or extreme difficulty understanding their finances. With the pattern of life moving toward more personal control of finances and pensions, there is a need to examine levels of financial literacy and better equip older people to maintain their dignity and independence in old age.

Recommendations for LSCs

- **Help local information, advice and guidance partnerships and local Lifelong Learning Partnerships to consider the financial literacy needs of older people in terms of curriculum relevance, guidance, how to reach older people, location and cost of learning.**
- **Support local community-based and owned collaborative projects (for example, working in sheltered housing, and residential care, employment related initiatives, community banking initiatives and older people's organisations) to better understand how and where to reach older people.**

Useful contacts: Sasha Anderson, Information Officer Older & Bolder, NIACE. Tel: 0116 204 4227, email: sasha.anderson@niace.org.uk

Mid-life planning and pre-retirement education

In such a rapidly changing society, with changing pensions arrangements and work patterns, there is a need for high-quality, widely available 'preparation for later life' education.

Recommendations for LSCs

- **Map existing pre-retirement programmes to ascertain the quality, quantity and accessibility of local provision.**
- **Develop pilot initiatives to equip older people with the skills to plan for later life.**

Useful contacts: Jo Walker, Resources Manager, Pre-Retirement Association, 9 Chesham Road, Guildford, Surrey, GU1 3LS. Tel: 01483 301170 Web site: www.pra.uk.com

4th Age

Investing in more and better learning opportunities for older people has been shown to lessen dependency, improve quality of life and reduce the costs of medication and care.

Demographic trends show that the number and proportion of older people in the UK is increasing, and the costs of long-term care are expected to rise significantly. The patterns of care for older people are changing, with care-planning strategies aimed to keep people in their own homes for longer.

Recommendations for LSCs

- **Support better training for those who provide care and activities for older people in care settings.**

- **Encourage LLPs, LEAs and LSCs to consider the learning needs of 4th Agers in their lifelong learning plans and in collaboration with those developing the community care plans.**
- **Encourage production and dissemination of good practice in this area.**

Useful contacts: National Association for Providers of Activities for Older People (NAPA), 5 Tavistock Place, London, WC1H 9SN. Tel: 020 7383 5757 Web site: www.napa-web.co.uk

The Department for Work and Pensions has the lead role in challenging ageism in employment with its Age Positive campaign, which is promoting the business benefits of employing an age diverse workforce. The campaign focuses on the Code of Practice on Age Diversity in Employment and a wide range of research and development activities with both public and private organisations to help employers develop non-ageist employment practices that will help them prepare for the future legislation. For more information see the Age Positive web site: www.agepositive.gov.uk

Employability

For many excluded older people, access to relevant, sensitive and timely adult education raises self-esteem and confidence and as a consequence also creates opportunities to consider future employment prospects.

A Government report '*Winning the Generation Game*' (published April 2000) put the cost of the drop in the employment rate of the over 50s since 1979 at about £16 billion a year in lost Gross Domestic Product and £3-5 billion in extra benefits and lost taxes. A third of people aged 50 to State Pension Age in Britain are inactive or displaced from the labour market.

The employment rate for the over 50s at 68% falls short of the overall employment rate of 75%. For those over 50 there is a comprehensive range of back to work help including New Deal 50 Plus, New Deal 25 Plus and the New Deal for Disabled People. The employment rate for the over 50s has increased each year for the last four years. Through New Deal 50 Plus alone, since April 2000, almost 62,000 people over 50 have been helped back to work.

New Deal 50 Plus was introduced to address the problems of unemployed older workers and the difficulties they encounter in finding work. The New Deal 50 Plus package consists of payment of a tax-free Employment Credit, a Training Grant once in employment and a wide range of practical support from a Personal Adviser at a Jobcentre.

The area of employability is covered in more detail in a parallel briefing on older people and work from Third Age Employment Network (TAEN). It highlights the fact that the last 25 years has seen a dramatic decline in the number of those in work after the age of 50, and many of those who have left the workforce seem to have done so unwillingly. There are around 2.8 million people aged 50-65 who are economically inactive, of whom about 1 million are 'hidden unemployed' and want to work, at an estimated £31 billion cost to the economy. This coincides with a time of increasing life expectancy and when people are being encouraged to take responsibility for their finances into old age.

Recommendations for LSCs

- **Include in regular surveys and plans the scale and cost to the local economy of inactivity of older people.**
- **Identify, promote and support projects that help older people obtain work.**
- **Support initiatives to help mature workers and job-seekers to prepare for specific industries, including those where there are skills shortages.**
- **Work with local employers, trades unions and training organisations to find ways to employ mature workers.**
- **Work with Jobcentre Plus.**
- **Identify and publicise employer 'champions'.**
- **Review the learning and training provision available locally to support older people becoming, or hoping to become, self-employed.**

Useful contacts: Patrick Grattan, Chief Executive, Third Age Employment Network (TAEN), 207-220 Pentonville Road, London, N1 9UZ. Tel: 020 7843 1590 Website: www.taen.org.uk.
Employers Forum on Age, Astral House, 1268 London Road, SW16 4ER. Tel: 020 8765 7597 Website: www.efa.org.uk
Age Positive web site: www.agepositive.gov.uk

Citizenship

It is widely accepted and recognised that participation in learning has much wider benefits than contributing to a competitive economy. Volunteering involves new learning and benefits those participating. Communities can only benefit from an increasingly active, engaged older population that is encouraged to share its vast wealth of experience. *Winning the Generation Game* refers to the need to encourage older people to volunteer, and this has resulted in the establishment of the Experience Corps.

Recommendations for LSCs

- **Ensure that there is targeted local education and guidance to help older people decide how to become involved in their communities.**
- **Work with the BGOP Older People's Advisory Group, and the large network of Older People's Forums led by older people and developed by bodies such as Age Concern, Help the Aged and others, to help develop opportunities for older people become more active citizens.**

Useful contacts: Experience Corps web site: www.experiencecorps.co.uk and information line 0800 10 60 80

Advice and guidance

For many older people there can be an uncertainty as to what the future holds in terms of work, income, health and fulfilment. People do need assistance to help them analyse their life successes, present situation and consider future options. This can be through formal advice and guidance agencies or through targeted learning activities such as the 'bite size' programme. The development of Connexions is a positive move to develop a coherent service for younger people. It is to be hoped that the complex needs of adults of all ages and stages of life can also be accommodated in such a coherent way. The sensitisation to age issues of adult services requires consideration. In recent years there has been a proliferation of third age agencies developing such expertise and sensitivities themselves to cover the void in statutory provision.

Recommendations for LSCs

- **Consider how advice and guidance can be provided for older people and in what way the plans of local information, advice and guidance partnerships reflect the needs and concerns in this area.**

Useful contacts: The Guidance Council, 2 Crown Walk, Jewry Street, Winchester, SO23 8BB. Tel: 01962 878340 Web site: www.guidancecouncil.com
National Institute for Careers Education and Counselling (NICEC), Sheraton House, Castle Park, Cambridge, CB3 0AX. Tel: 01223 460277 Web site: www.crac.org.uk

Gender

The provision of learning activities should take into consideration how older women might have been marginalized through their lives by denial of educational opportunities, by family commitments to children, partners and parents, by lack of access to pensions and benefits and by access to limited and unfulfilling employment opportunities.

Women live longer and are more likely to be the recipients of care which does not necessarily consider gender issues.

The changing employment patterns among older people show that women age 50 plus are more likely to be in work than men, but there are questions around the quality of that work in terms of status, hours worked, wages and security. A report undertaken by the East Midlands Development Agency in 2000 highlighted a survey which revealed that in 2006 the number of women aged 45-59 will form the largest group in the region's labour force, having risen by 54% (113,000) from their 1986 level, compared to a 25% (76,000) rise in the number of men.

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Recommendations for LSCs

- **In considering learning interventions designed to reach excluded older women, attention needs to be given to the factors that might have contributed to their exclusion.**

Useful contacts: Older Women's Network Europe, Via del Serraglio 10 - 06073 Corciano (PG), ITALY. Tel./Fax: (+39) 075 506 8006 Web site: http://own-europe.org

What is Older & Bolder?

NIACE's Older & Bolder initiative promotes learning opportunities for older people. This covers the whole range of learning for whatever purposes in whatever setting at times and in ways appropriate to their stated needs.

The work of Older & Bolder includes collecting and disseminating information around issues relevant to older learners. It involves publishing newsletters, briefing papers and policy papers, and organising conferences and seminars. It also includes maintaining a specialist reference library and database of good practice, running email discussion groups for practioners and older learners themselves, and providing guidance on curriculum and provision.

For further details about Older & Bolder contact Sasha Anderson, Information Officer at NIACE, tel: 0116 2044227, email: sasha.anderson@niace.org.uk. Information about the programme can also be found on the NIACE web site: www.niace.org.uk/research/older_bolder/default.htm

References and Further Reading

Ethnic Minority Communities

Older & Wiser: A Study of Educational Provision for Black and Ethnic Minority Elders. Stella Dadzie. NIACE, 1993. ISBN 1 872941 48 6

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Summing Up: Bridging the Financial Literacy Divide. National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux, 2001.

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Learning in the Fourth Age. Jim Soulsby. DfEE, May 2000. ISBN 1841852821

Employability

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Code of Practice on Age Diversity in Employment. Department for Work and Pensions Publications, Sherwood Park, Annesley, Nottingham NG15 0DJ. Also available to download from www.agepositive.gov.uk

Evaluation of the Code of Practice on Age Diversity. Department for Work and Pensions Publications, Sherwood Park, Annesley, Nottingham NG15 0DJ. Also available to download from www.agepositive.gov.uk

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NIACE, the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, has a broad remit to promote lifelong learning opportunities for adults. NIACE works to develop increased participation in education and training. It aims to do this for those who do not have easy access because of barriers of class, gender, age, race, language and culture, learning difficulties or disabilities, or insufficient resources.

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